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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000365

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL KDEM IZ

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS MINISTER COMPLAINS ABOUT IRAQI
DETENTION FACILITIES AND BSP

Classified By: DEPUTY POLCOUNS FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a meeting January 29, Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Mikha'il Salim told PolOff that she was disturbed by what she perceived to be a lack of action on the part of GOI to address overcrowding and detainee abuse issues, particularly in the face of a potential influx of detainees under the Baghdad Security Plan. She explained that she met with the Prime Minister the previous week to express these concerns and request that she attend MCNS meetings to highlight human rights issues that might arise with any increased security operation. She said that the Prime Minister had politely refused her request, instead suggesting that she join the Baghdad Security's Plan services committee led by DPM Zowbai. Despite this, the Prime Minister raised the Minister's concerns in the MCNS (sep), taking to task Minister of Justice for detention facility human rights issues. In other news, the Minister reported that she was losing ground within her party (Iraqiyya), and that fellow party members had recommended to leader Ayad Allawi that she be replaced. She assured PolOff that despite the recommendations (particularly by CoR member Alia al Ubaidi), other political party leaders such as Abdul Azziz al Hakim) had stepped in to prevent such a move. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On January 29, Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Mikha'il Salim, told PolOff that she was fed up with the state of affairs of the Iraqi detention facility system, and complained that the GOI had not adequately thought out how they would deal with any increase in detention operations that may occur from the BSP. She noted that an increase in detainees with no new facilities or expedited judicial review would only exacerbate the problems that already existed such as overcrowding and abuse. She noted that these problems were already pervasive in MoI/MOD facilities, and placed some blame on the poor judicial capacity to handle these cases, as well as what she characterized as an ISF culture of mass arrest sweeps without regard to whether a detainee may be a suspect or an innocent bystander. She also argued that a system dedicated to arresting people and determining their guilt or innocence several months later could only lead to bitterness at best on the part of the population targeted for arrest) especially if there were torture or abuse administered.

¶3. (C) The Minister said that on January 20, she asked the Prime Minister for the ability to participate in the MCNS, arguing that in the end it was her ministry that had to deal with the complaints and negative repercussions of security operations. She argued that the detention facility conditions were overcrowded and sometimes abusive, and that the human rights ministry should be directly involved in ensuring that human rights standards were maintained. She asserted that little thought had been taken

by the other ministries involved in how to reduce the overcrowding or abusive conditions in these facilities. The Prime Minister denied her request to attend the MCNS and instead suggested that she participate in one of the Baghdad Security Plan Committees, particularly the Services committee. The subsequent day in the MCNS, the PM noted that the Human Rights minister had complained about the conditions of detention facilities, and took the Minister of Justice to task on these complaints (septel).

¶4. (C) In other news, the Minister explained that several members of Iraqiyya members, particularly Alia al Obeidi who she said was very interested in becoming a Minister, had approached party leader Ayad Allawi on replacing Salim. She told PolOff she was surprised when SCIRI leader Abdul Azziz al Hakim and Badr Corps leader Hadi al Amiri separately called her to say that they would prevent such a move. She told PolOff that she did not consider this to be a substantive threat.

¶5. (C) Comment: Several months after taking the helm of the ministry, Minister Wijdan has found her voice and has become more proactive in talking with the Prime Minister on issues of serious human rights abuses. Despite a not so favorable relationship with a few members in her party, she believes that she is well-respected by the Prime Minister who she says has on numerous occasion personally assured her of high regard that he has for her and her objectivity. Poor detention facility conditions (particularly MoI/MOD) is not a new issue, but is one that the Ministry under Minister Wijdan's leadership is placing more focus on. It is also an issue that the Sunni parties have been approaching the ministry more and more on of late. End Comment.

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